

Statement
of
ZIPORA MAZENGO

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

“International Trafficking in Persons:
Taking Action to Eliminate Modern Day Slavery”

October 18, 2007

Good morning. My name is Zipora Mazengo, and I am twenty-seven years old. I came to the United States from Tanzania in June 2000 to work for a diplomat and his family. The diplomat is also from Tanzania. His name is Alan Mzengi. He still serves at the Tanzanian Embassy.

I worked for the Mzengis for four years as a nanny and a housekeeper. And they never paid me.

I came to the United States legally on a special visa, one that diplomats can get to bring over nannies and domestic workers. The Mzengis sent me a contract in Tanzania. The contract promised that I would earn \$900 per month. The contract said that I would get two weeks vacation each year. And the contract said that I would get two days off each week.

I signed the contract and went with Mrs. Mzengi's grandfather to the U.S. Embassy in Dar-es-Salaam to get a visa. The officials at the embassy looked at the contract and asked Mrs. Mzengi's grandfather questions in English. I did not understand English and did not answer any questions.

I flew to the United States alone. When I arrived, Mr. Mzengi met me at the airport and immediately took my passport and contract away from me. He held my passport for four years, until I escaped in 2004.

I worked for the Mzengis in their large house in Gaithersburg. I had to clean the whole house, cook, do the laundry, and take care of the three children. I worked sixteen hours each day: from 6 in the morning until 10:30 each night, every day.

My contract had said that I would earn \$900 each month. But the Mzengis never paid me. When I asked the Mzengis for my wages, they said they would hurt me and send me home.

My contract said that I would have two weeks vacation each year and two days off each week, but I never had a single day off. I was not permitted to leave the house.

My contract made it seem like I would have a good job. But when I made any mistakes, Mrs. Mzengi would scream at me. Once when I did not prepare her breakfast, she hit me on the face and sent me out in my summer clothes to stand outside in the snow. She told me that if I complained, "blood would fall on the floor."

My contract said that I would receive medical care. But when my toes became infected, the Mzengis did not take me to a doctor. My feet bled, and I could not wear shoes. But Mr. Mzengi made me go outside to shovel snow in my bare feet. Finally, two years after the infection began, Mrs. Mzengi took me to a doctor, and I had surgery in the doctor's office.

My contract was full of lies.

A Good Samaritan helped me escape from the Mzengis' home, and she found a lawyer for me at CASA of Maryland. My lawyer, Elizabeth Keyes, helped me to get a T-visa.

My lawyer wrote to the Tanzanian Ambassador and the U.S. Department of State. The Embassy of Tanzania ignored me, and did not help me to get my wages. The Department of State did not help me. In 2006, my lawyer asked the Diplomatic Security Services at the Department of State to begin an investigation, but they did not.

In November 2006, my lawyers arranged for me to meet with a prosecutor at the Department of Justice. He began an investigation of the Mzengis and I cooperated in the investigation. But nothing has happened to Mr. Mzengi or Mrs. Mzengi.

In April 2007, my lawyers filed a lawsuit against Mr. and Mrs. Mzengi for trafficking me to the United States and forcing me to work for four years without any wages. I still have not received any money. The Mzengis have ignored the lawsuit.

I agreed to come today to speak with you because I do not want what happened to me to happen to anyone else. The Mzengis kept me in their home for four years, and forced me to work day and night without ever paying me. They stole my passport from me. They stole my freedom from me. They stole four years of my life.

But the Mzengis are free. They have not been punished. And they have not paid. I want justice for me. But I also want to stop diplomats from exploiting other people in this way. It is wrong.

Thank you for listening.